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## Adoption project unifies 21 families

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By **STEPHEN FRYE**  
Of The Oakland Press

Most people don't get to sit on a judge's lap or order the people in the courtroom to stand or be seated.

But kids going through the adoption process sometimes do.

This week, 21 families formalized their parent-child relationships in Oakland County Circuit Court as part of a statewide effort during Thanksgiving week to showcase the positive force of adoption.

Harbinder Virdee and his wife, Dawn Presby-Virdee, spent two years trying to expand their family, and that effort came to a happy conclusion Tuesday. Today, they celebrate Thanksgiving as an official family of four. "We always wanted to adopt one or two, mostly to make a kid happy," said Virdee, of South Lyon. A native of India who works as an engineer with Ford Motor Co., he said they still wanted to adopt even after they had a daughter, Suhana, seven years ago. Suhana pushed them to add a seat at the dinner table. "I always wanted a sister," Suhana said after Anjani



Dawn Presby-Virdee holds biological daughter Suhana, 7, while her husband, Harbinder Virdee, holds adopted daughter Anjani, 2 1/2, at their home in South



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was formally made a sister with a judge's signature. Lyon. -The Oakland Press/JOSE JUAREZ  
 The family found Anjani, who is now 2 1/2, in India.  
 Bringing Anjani into the fold had similarities to their first daughter's arrival - the joy of bringing a new child home and the pain of the process.

"It's the same thing," said Presby-Virdee. "It's the same as childbirth. You forget everything you went through. You're so glad to have them."

The couple submitted to an FBI check and other background checks, and were fingerprinted. But it was all worth it, she said, cuddling Anjani with a happy smile.

"The waiting was the worst part," Harbinder Virdee said, noting the family had been told who they would adopt and had received a picture and information about Anjani. "We had to wait a year."

Anjani has been with the family since April while the formal adoption process dragged on.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien, who has a family division docket, asked the couple: "How long has it been?"

"Two years," they answered.

"Two years? You get an A for perseverance - incredible," O'Brien said.

The judge asked the parents if they knew they were undertaking "legal obligations of intellectual, spiritual and moral guidance," to which they answered yes in unison.

"The record will reflect they are both smiling," O'Brien said.

But he was also serious.

"You're going to have a big job ahead of you," he said. "It is with pride and honor that I say this to you - your request is granted."

O'Brien invited both children up to his bench. He encouraged Suhana to order the audience to rise and the sit, delighting the youngsters as family members snapped photographs.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca said he had to fight back tears watching a ceremony on Tuesday, highlighted with a recounting of a newborn being adopted. His office's role in families is typically to seek either permanent termination of parental rights or temporary wardship when parents get into trouble.

"In these cases (of adoption), you are unifying a family who wants, needs and loves each other," Gorcyca said. "They are able to give these children a shot at life. It's what every kid needs."

Lauran Howard, chief of adoptions for Oakland County, said 600 adoptions go through the county's circuit court, though most foreign adoptions are completed overseas.

"We do the second-highest number in the state behind Wayne County," Howard said. "It is wonderful to have it be so nice and significant in the court. You are creating a family. Usually, the rest of the family division's work is dismantling families in some way or another (with divorces and parental neglect cases)."

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She said adoptions are finalized each week, rotating between the eight family court judges, all of whom want to hear these cases.

Later, O'Brien told another family about his joy in overseeing these cases.

"If you could only imagine what goes on inside these four walls," he said. "This just breathes life into these walls. It is with honor and congratulations that I grant this."

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